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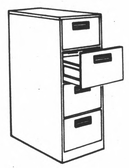

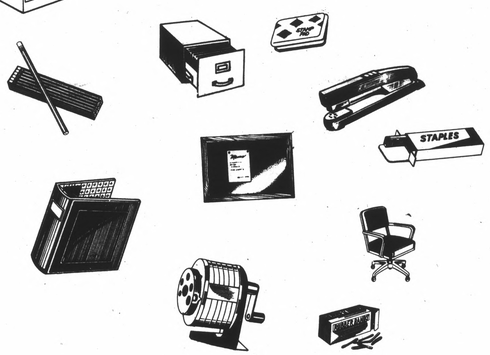

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THEN and NOW!

By Frances H. Paulette

Part 2

Born, Reared, & Served In A Village Post Office

Here you see a part of the old Evergreen Post Office fixtures, good THEN, good NOW!

Didn't I tell you that John Kent had a 'bit of everything' in that store? Do you know why you don't see Ruby? She ducked behind the counter just as I took the picture!

The morning of May 8, 1942 was warm but Ruby Wooldridger Hamilton (Mrs. John Kent Hamilton), was even warmer! She was excited.

Both John Kent and Ruby had known for some time that the letter was going to arrive; after all, John Kent had been appointed acting postmaster of the Evergreen Post Office just a month and a few days earlier, April 1st. So, while the letter making him 'officially' postmaster was no surprise it was welcomed with no less enthusiasm.

Local residents stopping by the post office were accustomed to being greeted with a smile from Ruby but on this particular day the smile was even broader and the spring in her step had just a little more spring to it!

Being postmaster was nothing new to John Kent Hamilton; he had helped his father, the late Jim Hamilton, since he had been a little fellow. His father served the Evergreen Community as postmaster for 28 years. Little did John Kent realize that he would be serving in that same capacity for the next 36 years and five months.

While the postmaster was new, the fixtures in the post office were not. In fact, the carrier's desks that were used when John Kent took over and are even in the post office today came out of the post office when the late J. H. Cheatham was postmaster. This was some time prior to the time when John's father served.

When he retired at the end of August of this year, John Kent had served the longest term of any postmaster serving the Evergreen Community. During those years there were a lot of changes.

John Kent distinctly remembers the horse and buggy days when there were two rural routes going out from Evergreen Post Office. One was daily delivery and the other was tri-weekly. In addition there was a Star Route from Evergreen to Andersonville in Buckingham County which served three post offices along the way. They were Hollywood, Fore's Store and Chestnut Grove.

That's not all that John Kent remembers either. He has a vivid picture in his mind of the ending of World War 1. There was nothing less than a tin-pan parade in Evergreen to celebrate the occasion.

"For many years before my father retired as postmaster," stated John Kent recently, "I was his assistant and also served as mail messenger. Part of the job was carrying the mail sack back and forth to the Evergreen Railroad Station to meet the trains. I had to hang the mail pouches on the crane to be picked up by the fast trains."

There are many experiences that will remain clear in John Kent's storehouse of memories, but some of the most significant are things that happened shortly after he was appointed acting postmaster in the spring of 1942.

World War 11 had just begun and this meant a heavier workload for the postmaster. Overseas mail came heavy at times and in addition to this, the post office sold war stamps. The trains were often off schedule. Quite often John was asked to open the post office on Sunday so that a parent might be able to get news from a son in the armed forces.

"I remember on one occasion," related John Kent with a smile, "I was called out of bed in the middle of the night by a patron who had failed to come for the mail during the day. The mother, worrying about her son in the service could not get to sleep until she found out whether or not there was any mail from her son. There was a letter."

John Kent didn't have to get out of bed to go to the post office to accomodate this family, but he put himself in their shoes and knew that it was something he had to do. That is the kind of man he is, a caring and concerned kind of man.

With a smile John Kent continued.....

"I also remember one family who had been several weeks without hearing from their son in service. Every day they came the distance of four miles to the Evergreen Post Office hoping to get news from that son but no news came. One day, however, they failed to get to the post office as usual. When the mail was being put in the boxes I noticed a letter to this family from their son. I could hardly wait go close the office. I got in my car and delivered the letter to the anxious parents. Such happiness and rejoicing is seldom witnessed."

This kind of thing is not a bit unusual for John Kent; he was taught from childhood that "real service begins where duty ends."

The village postmaster, in addition to his regular duties, must be be able to do many things. He has to act as janitor, banker, interpreter, stenographer, handwriting expert and act as head of the "bureau of information."

With a twinkle in her eye and a laugh in her voice, Ruby spoke of earlier days.

"It was always such a happy day when the Sears Roebuck and the Montgomery Ward Catalog came; they meant so much to the dwellers in the village."

On one occasion, many years ago, John Kent even lost a sack of mail. Snow was falling on ground that was already white; steam from the train's engine was pouring downward. The mail sack was thrown from a fast moving train and lost in a snowbank. It was not until the snow began to melt approximately a week later that the mail sack was recovered.

The Evergreen Post Office is located in the rear of Hamilton's Store. When you go to the post office you can also do your shopping; they seem to have a bit of everything! And that's not all.....

John Kent's Store served as a big game checking station during hunting season. John Kent, quite a hunter himself who usually takes par. of his vacation during the hunting season said, "I really enjoy seeing the big game and hearing the tales of the hunters." Now, Now, John Kent, just how many tall tales have you told!

Believe it or not, there is more that is really interesting about this fellow, John Kent. Next week we'll complete the story of the Village Postmaster.

CLOVER HILL

Pankey & Wooldridge Family Reunion

The children of the late James Pankey and Dr. Wooldridge held their family reunion last Saturday in Buckingham, Va. A large crowd from both far and near were here to make the day a great big success. It was held at the home of Mrs. Lula Pankey Smith.

Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Berkley were very glad to have all five of their children home for the Labor Day week end -- and their new grandson.

There will be a regular service at the Gravel Hill Baptist Church this Sunday at 11:30 a.m. Please come out and be with us.

We are praying for all the sick and shut-in, both far and near.

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